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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Deep Wood's Woven Shade: Apparition Poem #1208

You bed down in a sty,
squeeze out your mind
like a rag, catch water
(usually greasy) in tins,
mix them up (murkiness
is not undesired), add an
edge of cyanide (or gin),
yet you know all the time
none of this will do much
good, or anything at all,
most of it is destined as
bricks in no wall, thus
does the blood spill, but
when you heal, how you
grab the sun & moon places
you where chemicals beg
your brain for admittance—

<< Home

Poems

P.F.S.: Correspondence (2005)

Apparition Poem #1342 (for Jenny Kanzler)

Apparition Poem #557

Apparition Poem #1473 (2)

Revolver: take arms against a sea of troubles...

Returns

Apparition Poem #1473

New Apparition Poems 2013-2014

Plymouth-Whitemarsh: Book #2

Rubber Soul: The Word

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

P.F.S.: Correspondence (2005)

Good morning! I have one request: again, please PLEASE do not brag to Gruberg about you and me banging!!! No way! I may be accidentally sleeping my way through Philadelphia's literary scene- and it's none of his business anyway- but no matter how much you dislike the guy, please don't gloat! Whatever purposes I am good for- I am not to be used for gloating purposes.

Muchos gracias,
Hannah

Come on & give me some credit! I'm a pretty classy guy, & I have no intention of saying anything to Nick. Why would I? I'm an adult, & I know how to keep things to myself when necessary. I've been avoiding Nick anyway. Also, you should know I had a great time. You're a wonderful lover.

Best,
Adam

What a sweet thing to say! I'm so glad you think so. I woke up in the morning thinking: Dear God, I must have been awful, there's nothing worse than having sex with someone so drunk they have lost all coordination. Besides, I had that roast beef sandwich to compete with.

Yours,
Hannah

<< Home

Poems

Apparition Poem #1342 (for Jenny Kanzler)
Apparition Poem #557
Apparition Poem #1473 (2)
Revolver: take arms against a sea of troubles...
Returns
Apparition Poem #1473
New Apparition Poems 2013-2014
Plymouth-Whitemarsh: Book #2
Rubber Soul: The Word
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Portal-ways in Mos...

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Apparition Poem #1342 (for Jenny Kanzler)

What's in what eyes?
What I see in hers is
mixed greenish silence,
somewhat garish, it's
past girlish (not much),
but I can't touch her
flesh (set to self-destruct),
anymore than she can
understand the book
her cunt is, that no one
reads directly, or speaks
of, there's no love other
than "could be," but I
think of her throat cut—
that's her slice of smut.

<< Home

Poems

Apparition Poem #557
Apparition Poem #1473 (2)
Revolver: take arms against a sea of troubles...
Returns
Apparition Poem #1473
New Apparition Poems 2013-2014
Plymouth-Whitemarsh: Book #2
Rubber Soul: The Word
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Portal-ways in Mos...
Something Solid:: Aughts Philly: Glass Doors in Sy...

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Rubber Soul: The Word

I said to my friend, “love”
was the one we both missed,
w knit stockings, red gloves,
apple-pie eyes. She ran away
from booze, smoke, our beds.
She was too good for us. Now
all we have is the word: “love.”

He told me I misunderstood,
that it’s the word not the girl
that matters: “love” is self-
creating, a verdict delivered
on creation, a benediction on
all manners of bullshit, hung
on our days like stalagmites.

Well, I said, as long as there’s
something in the world other
than bullshit, I guess there’s
something to hope for from
each moment. Not much, he
said, but we have to go, I need
a beer, & he was right, & we went.

<< Home

Poems

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Portal-ways in Mos...
Something Solid:: Aughts Philly: Glass Doors in Sy...
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Starlight in Ink P...
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Portal-ways in P.F...
from Something Solid on PennSound
Nine Paintings
The Lost Twins
1,000,000
Meeting Halfway
Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Pride (in ...

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Pride (in the name of love)

The buildings are the road, voyage, reason.
The spirit you think is there, in architecture, is there,
along with other spirits, namely, spirits
hewn into coexisting nature, creating a sublime sense of
balance. Apotheosis of coexistences.
The collection of buildings here is resonant— shudders,
palpitates, resonates. Where & how you get touched
is the enchantment variable. It could be Fayette Street (two churches),
City Hall in May, Butler Pike, even the lunar landing
lunacy of Dekalb Pike. The road you travel on is into the cosmos.
This is it— my Philadelphia. The buildings say everything.
What I say now is reason again, to bring us
roundabout— the buildings are the road.
What is really in the cosmos remains the mystery.

<< Home

Poems

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Feast or Famine in...
The Posit Trilogy: Deposit: To Augustine
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poem #2041
The E Sequence
Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems
Dance Monkey: Madame Psychosis: Fragment: Jennifer
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2043
Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2053

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

The Posit Trilogy: Deposit: To Augustine

To Augustine, after reading his *Confessions*

If you really did find
something or someone
immutable, freed from
torturous progress, I
can't say I don't believe—

If you came to rest
apart from the unworkable
aligned profoundly with
profundity's alignment,
congrats from a still point—

If I seem cynical,
catching your desperation
as tides confounded you,
I at least know your death,
its heft, text, all plumbed

by me, or someone else.

****To Augustine originally appeared in Otoliths 32 in 2014****

Poems

Dance Monkey: Apparition Poem #2041
The E Sequence
Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems
Dance Monkey: Madame Psychosis: Fragment: Jennifer
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2043
Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2053
Equations: Thesis: Heather Mullen
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Painter on Syn...

<< Home

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Dance Monkey: Apparition Poem #2041

A quarter of a century
has passed
since I took the teenage
townie to a new place
transgressive
in a subletted room
on West Nittany
if I have no regrets
it's because those text-piles
on that carpeted floor
have passed into
ink somewhere
past that room
she has too
the second phase of the game

<< Home

Poems

The E Sequence
Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems
Dance Monkey: Madame Psychosis: Fragment: Jennifer
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2043
Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2053
Equations: Thesis: Heather Mullen
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Painter on Syn...
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Genius Loci

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Dance Monkey: Madame Psychosis: Fragment: Jennifer

Jennifer steps out of maggots & dust—
a goddess of trailers, who'll try, as she must,
to bless, as a cornfield, the rigors of lust—

coming from me into her like a spark,
glazing with moonlight the rooms where, in dark,
the ooze of the universe made a new mark.

<< Home

Poems

Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2043
Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2053
Equations: Thesis: Heather Mullen
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Painter on Syn...
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Genius Loci
LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): #29
P.F.S. Post: Waxing Hot
Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Plain View
Something Solid: Aughts Philly:

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Undulant on P.F.S....

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2043

For God to be God
God has to be something else
the manifestation of a center point
of perfectly well-rounded goodness
incorrigibly manning the ambiguous
affirming all sides of every equation
responsive both personally, impersonally
conscious & unconscious

but then, being there & not somewhere else
the Ontological Argument falls flat
God's not God
for God to be God

<< Home

Poems

Equations
Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2053
Equations: Thesis: Heather Mullen
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Painter on Syn...
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Genius Loci
LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): #29
P.F.S. Post: Waxing Hot
Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Plain View
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Undulant on P.F.S....

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Something Solid:
Aughts Philly: The Studio on Argo...

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Dance Monkey: Apparition Poems: #2053

I have written
the poems
that were in the icebox
& which you were probably
hoping to power-block
forgive me
they are delicious
so sweet
& so cold

<< Home

Poems

Equations: Thesis: Heather Mullen
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Painter on Syn...
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Genius Loci
LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): #29
P.F.S. Post: Waxing Hot
Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Plain View
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Undulant on P.F.S....
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Studio on Argo...
from LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): "#11"
Equations: Thesis: #20 (draft added

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July 2023)

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Equations: Thesis: Heather Mullen

Heather is easily misinterpreted. She goes to bed with me for complex reasons: because she has pity for this underling artist, who tries so hard to be recognized; because this underling artist gives her treats (a public forum for her own underling art); because she finds him hard to resist after a few drinks; and because, lo and behold, she is genuinely aroused by what happens when these things are investigated. I don't have many interpretations of Heather; she's average height, average weight, a face more handsome than beguilingly pretty (sort of a WASP Frida Kahlo, heavy eyebrows, thick lips, dark hair that rides her head in waves). But what happens in bed is so climactic that it takes us beyond our self-serving interpretations. This is a woman who gives; every inch of her is covered in desire, which can (and must) be fulfilled. Heather likes sex more than any other woman I've slept with. She screams, bites, moans, and there is such a delicious fluidity to her movements that, despite her near-homeliness, I am moved to do the same thing. Heather is teaching me how rare it is to find a partner who loves these processes, who makes sex a manifestation of spiritual generosity. We're both almost thirty; I've never seen someone who contains both the generosity and the sense of comfort Heather has in the physical act.

.....

In this favorite game, and when youth is involved, women often hold the cards. Heather has decided that we will have two nights, no more. There is something in me that wants and needs her too much. She is too touched, too moved. It's safer just to flush the thing. I don't particularly realize this, as we sit at the Cherry Street Tavern. All I know is an anxious feeling that I'm going on a trip and Heather is giving me a warm goodbye. It is a trip involving my art and my sense is that I'm going to get killed. Heather, she knows privately, is about to kill me too. She puts in her diaphragm and when I come, it is an exquisite lunge into some variant of heaven. Her intake of breath tells me that she is getting my stream. She might even be frightened that the diaphragm is punctured. Amidst all the peace and its benignity is the sense that things are getting out of hand. This is unsanctioned intercourse, out of mutual dependence; Heather feels this too much. So that, when I get back from my ten days in New England (where I have, in fact, been killed), Heather is nowhere to be found. That part of her that took my streams is loathe to take any more, too happy, too at peace. I learn that Heather represents

Poems

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Painter on Syn...

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Genius Loci

LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): #29

P.F.S. Post: Waxing Hot

Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Plain View

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Undulant on P.F.S....

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Studio on Argo...

from LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): "#11"

Equations: Thesis: #20 (draft added July 2023)

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that great portion of humanity that wants to be in pain. Ecstasy is a dead end street; it is too unreliable, too jumpy. Heather now goes for guys that give her the manner and form of the pain she wants, and not too much of the nice stuff.

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<< Home

Desmond Swords on Apparition Poems: UK List-Serve ...

Return to

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Genius Loci

West Philly swung, night by night, around all of us.
I couldn't not notice— Diana was delicately gorgeous.
She spent lots of time in the room next door.
One night, deep into the wee hours, & as
the entire house tripped (taken off, it
seemed, into distant universes, sucked into
black holes, or even flipped the switch into
primordial ooze & chaos), I swung dumbly
into Kevin's open door, found Diana tripping
on the bed, in tee & panties. As I sat down
on the bed, all that occurred to me was to
follow my instincts. The *genius loci* of that
place & time was all about nothing else, &
the sense that Diana, whose elegant lashes

& sculpted cheekbones belied her wildness,
existed as an archetype I came to worship
at the shrine of, even as music roared from
down the wood-floored hall, Mary & Abby
slept on the other side. I ascertained, later,
Diana, who I hadn't known before, had changed
her name, to stake a claim, against missing other ladies'
fun. She would become an arriviste for me, later,
also, once the two stalwarts were out of the way.
Hopefully, foggy memories would make me hesitant
to claim knowledge, more than stunted, of her
bellicose, venom-bordered insides, of a stunted child,
Lolita as painted by Goya. Lolita painted by Goya,
however, is still Lolita. Nothing child-like in that wildness.

Poems

LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): #29
P.F.S. Post: Waxing Hot
Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Plain View
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Undulant on P.F.S....
Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Studio on Argo...
from LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): "#11"
Equations: Thesis: #20 (draft added July 2023)
Desmond Swords on Apparition Poems: UK List-Serve ...
Equations: Thesis: #45 (added July 2023)

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From Galatea
Resurrects, 2008

<< Home

Return to

Art Recess

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

LTDM (*Letters to Dead Masters*): #29

George,

Strange dream last night. I was in bed all over again, in my apartment. I awoke, in the dream, to find Jena Strayner crawling across the floor, not far from the bed, as though she were a caterpillar. Only, she was a brunette this time, and didn't look older than ten years old. Her face remained unchanged. I asked her what she was doing here. She slithered backwards slightly, propped herself up on her elbows, looked me dead in the face, and said, "Because you are my husband, I am eternally damned." The feeling in the air was charged with menace. I felt something issue from her head, land next to the couch. It was a kind of whirligig— a congeries of raw consciousness data to fall into, veering off into the insanity of perceived damnation. I had an ESP moment, and knew that she was anticipating her death, in her mind's eye. But because she was ten years old, a brunette, and a caterpillar, all the menace-n-macabre crap in the air was charged also, with a tinge of the absurd. The sting of it was that when I woke, I did feel a strange energy in the apartment, a sense of the whirligig being real. I did live through my share of macabre moments with Ms. Strayner. What could be more macabre than room 510 of the Atherton Hilton? Or up-all-night in a trailer in Liverpool, Harrisburg 'burbs?

In waking news: with Dana now flaunting the guy she's seeing, I'm left to scope out other diversions. One is Kris, who I've finally been able to establish contact with. While she was unchaining her bike today, I managed to talk to her about a pertinent issue— the Grind no longer has a permit to allow outside seating. This means that we have to drag chairs from inside outside, on the few warm sparkling autumn days we have left. Today is one. Kris, up close, is vastly more sardonic (and shrewish) than Dana is. With her voluptuous proportions, she actually reminds me a little of Liz Taylor in Taming of the Shrew. The difference is that Shakespeare's Kate has no real sense of irony; Kris does. Kris has in her eyes that knowingness which says, quite plainly, once I've seen you with your pants off, I own you; once I own you, you become so magnificently ridiculous that you're to be held in my back pocket (nowhere else) interminably. If you want to call Dana and Kris the Doublemint Twins, Kris is certainly the more sinister of the two twins. What redeems her is honesty. Dana's veneer of niceness is always holding her back, especially considering how transparent it is. Kris just scoffs and rolls her eyes. Salt on the surface.

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One thing that is worth saying about Dana Blasconi: she comes from country stock, but she is by no means a typical country girl. True country girls always err towards the timid, the meek. They lack gumption, nerve in general. For Dana Blasconi to begin in the sticks, and wind up kicking serious ass (hokey contrivances and all), as she does here at the Grind in Center City Philly, bespeaks unusual courage, and an equally unusually robust sense of self. Dana didn't settle for the country deal at all. I can't not link her in my mind to Jena Strayner, who superficially partook of country life, all its lack of amenities. Jumping into a shotgun marriage which included all kinds of pornography-worthy sex, with the damned degenerate who happens to be writing this missive, was about raw courage, country values be damned. Jena Strayner belonged in Center City Philly as much as Dana does. Just as Dana belongs…anyway, both of them earn, for whatever it's worth, kudos from me about what it means to rebel fruitfully in the world, whatever stump-dumb aegis you happen to begin under. By staking a big claim on living a big life, however much I criticize them in my writing (this applies more to Dana), criticism will always be tempered by warmth and admiration.

By the way, Chip did finally show up today. We got, unfortunately, into a rather nasty argument. Chip is one of those semi-artist meatheads who insist (and it is a very American position) that an artist should be judged by the size of his or her audience. So, Bruce Springsteen becomes better than Beethoven, Allen Ginsberg superior to John Keats, and the Abstract Expressionists ride high over Goya. Chip even goes far enough to say that Bruce rivals Ludwig in musical complexity. I hit him with every imaginable jab — what art is to me (which has, built into, layers of snobbery which I embrace), what constitutes cultural hierarchies that actually work (over centuries), why America has seldom been taken seriously by world artists (and Larsen). I know, of course, what the subtext of Chip's argument is— I'm every bit the artist you are, and my opinions matter as much as yours. Well, no they don't. At the crucial, culminating moment, I revealed to Chip that 1) he is not an artist, 2) he's not even as good as I am at playing rock music, 3) his opinions on the arts, particularly the higher arts, are all hokey contrivances that are by no means commensurate with mine (I did lay it on thick). He got up abruptly (we were sitting outside), told me he'd never talk to me again, and drove off. I saw the man clearly, as I never had before; behind all his thought, the imperative to compete (on all levels and in all ways); the presumption of equality (misapplied to a realm in which there is no equality); and the philistinism that informs both post-modern art and rock music. America, Larsen says: more freedom, but among kiddies.

There's an anti-climactic feel to the Grind these days. Little dramas develop, coalesce, sputter into nothing. Tensions play themselves out on subterranean levels. People don't say too much, and what they say often amounts to a series of non sequiters. Also, the simple (but very painful) truth: I miss being young. My body of work sits on my back like Baudelaire's chimera. It also takes the form of a long-suffering mistress, requiring sorely needed, seldom received attention. But lovers and friends and contexts also create bodies of work, and at a certain saturation point you find yourself gazing blankly at a pile of bodies. To the extent that I can tolerate the sensation, I take my scalpel to the distempered parts of all these bodies, including my own. I can do dish about all this human stuff, but then art levels squish into it and the whole thing becomes a palpitating mess. I made the choice as a

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young man to surround myself with artists; this is surely my just dessert. Blue icing? Sometimes. But at least as hearty as Trish's eight thousand ways to do rice-and-vegetables.

Sauteed,

Adam

<< Home

Poems

P.F.S. Post: Waxing Hot

Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Plain View

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Undulant on P.F.S....

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Studio on Argo...

from LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): "#11"

Equations: Thesis: #20 (draft added July 2023)

Desmond Swords on Apparition Poems: UK List-Serve ...

Equations: Thesis: #45 (added July 2023)

From Galatea Resurrects, 2008

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From moria poetry, 2008

Return to

Art Recess

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Plain View

There it was: it could only happen once, that I
saw you for the last time. To take the livid, coal-
black rings around your eyes (black rings, also, not
surreptitiously around me-who-could-be-to-you,
who seduced you, led you away from your girls,
from whom the needle-injections tattooed all that
coal), dissolve the black into the gold which was
actually in your brain (which bid you see the world
strangely, shapes, colors, lights, movements of them,
with incredible vivid cleanliness, jarred into narrative
motion, again, by split-in-half sensibilities, being twins),
all that needs to be done is to put the paintings in
plain view in the world & step back. Plain view is still
plenty difficult, but I'm willing to find my own eye-rings to do it.

<< Home

Poems

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: Undulant on P.F.S....

Something Solid: Aughts Philly: The Studio on Argo...

from LTDM (Letters to Dead Masters): "#11"

Equations: Thesis: #20 (draft added July 2023)

Desmond Swords on Apparition Poems: UK List-Serve ...

Equations: Thesis: #45 (added July 2023)

From Galatea Resurrects, 2008

From moria poetry, 2008

Opera Bufa: "Divertimento Giocoso" or Coping with ...

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Sex and Shadows:
Mary Walker
Graham and
Stacy Blai...

Return to

Art Recess

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

from LTDM (*Letters to Dead Masters*): "#11"

Percy,

In December 1915, Picasso wrote a missive to Gertrude Stein which begins, “my life is hell.” The world was largely a charnel ground, then and now. And as you live through the decomposition of an empire, you realize that everything gets burnt, nothing is spared. But then, I wouldn’t be having these thoughts if I watched television. It is an opiate for the masses on an unforeseen scale; a thought-repellent that guarantees, like certain sedatives, a good night’s rest. What do I do between 7 and 11? Nothing— I look at the walls, note how shadows start creeping with greater and greater rapidity in August, then try to ignore the light created by the top of the utilities building across the street (as it flashes the time, temperature, advertisements, etc). That kind of time, *raw time*, filled by interior realities rather than exterior ones, has been losing ground for sixty years. That’s why the academics can never be too penetrating about someone like Beckett; you’ve either lived with raw time or you haven’t. It doesn’t have to be a lazy wallow— all kinds of surprising connections manifest, as your mind creeps out into the universe. Who knows, you might think; maybe there are races of beings out there who’ve subsisted for 200 billion years. They probably perceive us to be spoiled babies. If you choose to stay grounded, you may have the realization that each of your lovers secretly hates you. The human race who bother to love at all, love what they hate and hate what they love. That’s why Trish Webber, for example, was always giving me things and then taking them back: devotion, attention, willingness to submit in a wifely way. Love and hate in her could never resolve. The application of a non-palliative becomes palliative just in itself, in this kind of daze, with thoughts of this depth— you feel subtle currents run through you, moving you towards some kind of totalized realness or reality. Throw in kids and a wife, and you can forget about *raw time*; on this level, I still savor bachelorhood. A conventional situation will never do for me; I have no idea how I’ll be permitted to configure these things. Except freakishly.

Talking about conventional situations, I got to the Grind early today, in order to give me some time with Picasso unimpeded; I like his early stuff. Across from me sits Reed, who fronts a large jazz-rock band in the mold of the Weather Report. He’s got on a Gilligan hat, and a black vest over a blue polo; he’s working at his laptop. This guy is my friend on Facebook, and I’m on his e-mail list.

Poems

Equations: Thesis: #20 (draft added July 2023)

Desmond Swords on Apparition Poems: UK List-Serve ...

Equations: Thesis: #45 (added July 2023)

From Galatea Resurrects, 2008

From moria poetry, 2008

Opera Bufa: "Divertimento Giocoso" or Coping with ...

Sex and Shadows: Mary Walker Graham and Stacy Blai...

Equations, and Mary Evelyn Harju

Equations: New Visions on mp3

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After we exchange brief nods, I realize he's lost about fifteen pounds since I last saw him. He's either four or five years younger than me, I'm not sure. But he carries himself with the affected assurance of the eternal up-and-comer; the one who always wants to tell you, boy have I got plans; and this time (for once) there's no looking back. Truth be told, I was in this position for many years; I'll never forget that claw in my stomach that always said the same thing— something remains unproven, and you may or may not be able to prove it. That's the arts— a high school with few graduates. And if you're a poet, you can graduate and stay broke. To be Darwinian, I've got all the varsity "Vs" I need, and this guy doesn't. All the same, I wish him the best. Especially as there aren't too many graduates in Philly, and our version of "Arts High" is the inverse of Ridgemont— slow-paced and dull. But you better not start whining about what's in Manhattan, because nothing is.

Yours,

Adam

Chimes: New Visions on mp3

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Equations: Thesis: #20 (draft added July 2023)

But what the Devil does falls down around the heels when withholding is the only option. Ginny teaches me this, despite the great difference in our ages (my thirty-three to her twenty-two). When we try to escape, its' to a place of no consummations; when we go up, it's like a tarantula's leg that points back down again. Ginny must withhold because she belongs, in every sense, to her family. The luscious red hair, bulging green eyes, extreme voluptuousness of her appearance belie her raison d'etre: to bind and fasten. As she binds and fastens, there's more looseness than she realizes: you have to give in sometimes to get the goods. The truth emerges, after several months of "almost there": Ginny is a virgin. Ginny withholds because her parts have defects. Because she is sickly, her gorgeousness is one of the universe's cruel jokes. The joke is on her and her would-be lovers, and, like most of the best jokes, it isn't that funny. Ginny is one of those strange girls that seems to have no interests in life; that thinks that her body is her only mind; and that her body that is her mind must be so much an issue of blood that to blood it must return. To be a tart is simply recreation; but there is no sense of seriousness or duty behind it. Yet Ginny stands on the mountain of her own pulchritude, and surveys the carnage at the bottom with calculated niceness. She has never known submissiveness, even as part of a strategic plan, and never will; so she perpetually awakens to see she's done no real damage. Her mountain is a reverse mountain, which runs from the soil into hell. At a key moment, in the middle of a summer at the end of the Aughts, with Trish unhappily in Manhattan, Tobi fading, the Free School a memory, Ginny and her friends take the Drop hostage. I earn the right and privilege to be in Ginny's apartment (on Pine Street, down the street east from the Drop) several times, which resembles Julie's, high ceilings, wooden floors. Ginny sits next to me on her sofa and watches children's movies on her laptop. I try nothing. She wields an axe, and her physiology is resolutely shut-down, compacted. The Drop waves the white flag, and, as I knew even then, an era was ending. Everything about her group signaled that we'd all been having too much fun, and that the Center City-wide party was over. Actual sex was passe, beside the point. Besides, it was noticeable that when I walked around Center City that summer with Ginny, which I did, everyone looked at us as though we were a couple. Only I knew what was being withheld. The image crafted made me look studly. To her, that was more than enough. Funny: she wouldn't do bars. She just did her translation of bar-life into coffee shops, Temple classrooms, occasional drama productions. She was, herself, her own production— when she wore low-cut tops, or dresses, she was showing everyone

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who she was, and her breasts were a bared switchblade. That equation: sex used as an over or undertone to or for violence, or just the threat of violence: was big for her. Her tits were a weapon which could extort from the world what she wanted. All our idealism was replaced with back to the grind cynicism. Ginny's favorite dress for special occasions was black, and bared the fangs of her cleavage the right way.

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